

Retelling Through the Eyes of Innocents: A Study of *Jojo Rabbit* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*

Angela Teresa Kalloli¹, Sarika Tyagi²

¹Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India

²Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India

Correspondence: Sarika Tyagi, Professor, Department of English, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Received: August 15, 2022

Accepted: September 30, 2022

Online Published: October 6, 2022

doi:10.11114/smc.v10i2.5672

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v10i2.5672>

Abstract

This paper undertakes a study of the novels *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne and *Caging Skies* by Christine Leunens along with their award-winning movie retellings – *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by Mark Herman and Heyman, and *Jojo Rabbit* by Taika Waititi – to explore how the film retellings employ the technique of a child’s perception to provide a fresh perspective of one of the darkest moments of history: the Holocaust by the Nazi Regime. Rewriting, retelling and adapting historical, canonical or even familiar tale tropes are enduring conventions in literature and these are traditions central to many literary movements. Over the years, numerous movies have been crafted, retelling or adapting a short story or a novel or a play to a screenplay, furthering the scope of literary retellings via the visual media. These adaptations exhibit the capability of human creativity, human literary behavior, and the ability to bring about a novel and immersive experience of a literary piece. A comparative study of the novels and their movie retellings by employing a distinctive perspective is undertaken to throw light on the other factors influencing the popularity of the work. This paper also seeks to study the dynamics of the relationship between Literature and Media – with reference to select movies of the 21st Century, in particular, in retelling stories and making ventures to address aspects that the present century calls for, with the background of the past.

Keywords: retelling, film retelling, adaptation, literature and cinema, film studies, historical fiction

1. Introduction

Every piece of literature aims to tell a story or convey a pedagogical discourse but the two most common methods to present a particular story to the public are by way of a book or a movie. Literature can be defined as a gamut of written and oral works of lasting value. Often deemed ‘a mirror’, it is universally appealing, instructive, immersive and entertaining. Literature is like the biblical word being ‘alive and active’; in addition to being transformative, dynamic, encompassing all human experiences and an advocate of what its creator purports. It has the power to facilitate personal understanding and encourage social cohesion. Despite the sway that literature holds in general, the 21st Century society is considered a media-driven society. Media refers to the various means of communication that humanity avails for information and entertainment, such as the television, radio, newspaper and the internet. Media and literature share a relationship due to their wide range and emanative nature. Literature influences and gets influenced by society at a slower pace, whereas, the impact of media is prompt and quite often, instantaneous (Rao and Lakshmi, 2020). It is as Cardoso summarizes referring to Wells Lassagne and Armelle Parey, “Literature and Cinema share a history of connections with close bonds and parallel routes; they unite genres, eras, countries and formats – demanding literary and cinematic analyses, technical considerations and ideological issues” (Cardoso, 2019).

Literature allows the audience to depict the characters within their mind. As for the film, the audience has to transform the images displayed on the screen of the theatre into their mind and mold them into three dimensional figures. Film can also engulf the audience with the surroundings and the setting by merely showing the area and producing the natural sounds of the habitat throughout the film. Overall, film is an acceptable medium for reproducing literary arts, as well as adding an explicit entertainment value (Shakib, 2011).

The 21st century, with the internet and its immersive and interactive technology, ushered in the possibility for the media

to overtake literature, but their relationship remains symbiotic. The skyrocketing sales of popular books and their subsequent retellings via various forums and movie adaptations are proof enough. The numerous awards and accolades; the casting of eminent and award-winning actors to bring alive the characters on screen, and the substantial commercial success reiterate this fact. Research on these lines have recorded the process, the rationale, and the methodologies employed in the process of movie adaptations or onscreen retellings, comparing, contrasting, and cataloging the similarities and differences between both versions rooted in the theories of literary studies and media studies.

The works being studied, John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Christine Leunens' novel *Caging Skies*, and their respective onscreen adaptations or retellings *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and *Jojo Rabbit*, have been previously analysed as individual adaptations, with different themes and aspects in focus and as social commentaries. This study focuses on these four works because they are popular, well-known, and similar in style, premise, and presentation set in the context of the Holocaust as a caution and reminder of the extent to which extremist and divisive ideologies can strip humanity away. The chosen movie retellings apart from being lauded for using the voice of an innocent child deal with the mature consequences of choices made out of innocence and ignorance. This paper is the first to study the four works together and analyse the movie retellings for their unique perspective of innocence, historical contextualization, with attention to the issues related to hegemonic masculinities and issues of gender, indoctrination and belief systems. This study is thus unique as it addresses how historical contextualization, issues of gender, indoctrination and belief systems contribute to making the two movie retellings unlike other movies set in similar contexts. This study paves the path to analyze and study literary adaptations not just as a translation to a different media but draws attention to the art of retelling the work with novel perspectives, purposes, and thrust areas that address a larger audience in making the retelling extremely relevant to its time. This research contributes to the gamut of the interdisciplinary study of literature and media which is in vogue.

The novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* has been subtitled '*A Fable*', like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, but unlike the latter, this is a fable about human beings, set in the era of Nazi Germany's Third Reich that perpetrated the Holocaust. The novel and its largely faithful movie retelling thus afford a post-modern revisioning of the horrors of the holocaust through the eyes of a naïve, innocent and puzzled nine-year-old German boy. The 2019 movie *Jojo Rabbit* written and directed by Taika Waititi is a big screen retelling of Christine Leunens' novel *Caging Skies* published in 2008. In his *Jojo Rabbit*, Waititi has not only taken a piece of literature and absorbed its essence, but has transformed the novel to something starkly different in style, tone, genre and presentation. *Caging Skies* by Christine Leunens is set in the 1938-Vienna besieged by the Anschluss. It is the first-person narrative of Johannes Betzler, a 10-year-old boy who over the years that follow grows from a nervous recruit in the Hitler Youth, into a man. It is a gripping, disturbing and darkly comic novel about obsession and love set in the war-torn Vienna. While *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is just as gripping, disturbing – if not intensely tragic – and at the same time, a darkly comic novel about obsession and love set in Auschwitz. The love here is the deep friendship between the protagonist Bruno and Shmuel, and the obsession being Bruno's insatiable curiosity of the happenings of the farm with farmers in striped pajamas, which is the Auschwitz concentration camp.

1.1 Methodology

This paper explores how the two novels and their corresponding movie retellings by employing a child's perspective convey the puerile logic and nature of the holocaust and its perpetrators i.e., the Nazis of the Third Reich. Employing a comparative study of the nature of the treatment of events, historical contexts, themes, modifications, narrative styles and tone of the novels and their corresponding movies and of the movies themselves, this paper seeks to explore through comparison, the extent to which the purposes of the novels and the movie retellings have been fulfilled. This comparative study examines the repetition of authorial concerns in this adaptation while following the narratives of two texts.

The terms 'movie retelling' and 'movie adaptation' are used synonymously in this paper. The term 'retelling' indicates a new account or an adaptation of a story, if not a second or subsequent telling. The endeavour to retell or to rewrite is a constructive deconstruction. As Linda Hutcheon (2013) points out, "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing". Therefore, as both the adaptations examined "freely use the source text not only as a new perspective on the same story, but also as raw material from which to create its own original story world, allowing the new version to be an autonomous work in its own right" (Le Juez, 2021) they are retellings of an interdisciplinary nature.

1.2 Adaptation Theory

Due to the fact that *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and *Jojo Rabbit* are adaptations or retellings, adaptation theory is most suited to examine these films. When analysing *Jojo Rabbit* as an adaptation of *Caging Skies*, a fundamental grasp of adaptation theory pertaining to literature and media is essential. The film is loyal to the original material because it

retains its coherence and integrity by preserving all of the primary ideas and conflicts while changing or condensing certain incidental aspects. Previous studies on adaptation studies and movie adaptation in general provide the following framework to understand and apply adaptation theory. The film critic Leitch (2007) claims the adaptation theory as a discipline “is one of the oldest areas in film study”. Rebecca McLaughlin says, “Adaptation theory is used as a means to study films based on original, literary texts. Adaptations can reject parts of the original texts, emphasize certain aspects, serve to recreate or re-imagine, or successfully pay homage to the original work” (McLaughlin, 2015). This holds true for Heyman’s take on *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* as well. Fuzellier says, “Two central facets of adaptation are concentration – the maximum of events in the minimum of time and increase – and appreciation of certain aspects, such as character characteristics, episodes of diegesis, spatial or temporal facets” (Cardoso, 2019). This primarily demarcates a movie adaptation from the general plot. Brian McFarlane in his 1996 work *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, opines that employing the adaptation theory “does not stop at cataloguing differences, but in doing justice to both the director’s intentions, which may differ from the author’s” (Forceville, 1999). As a result, the adapted text is not something to be replicated, but it is something to be conceived and reinvented, oftentimes in a multimedia (Hucherson, 2006). Two elements of adaptation come out of these three components, interpretation and recreation. Adaptation manifests into a different media and provides explanations (Perdikaki, 2016). The levels of interpretation and clarity in recreation with the historical context and a sensibility of gender politics in mind render these two films truly noteworthy. The novels and the movies under study, primarily seek to interpret the flawed nature of discriminatory hatred and indoctrination leading to war, followed by war crimes in a manner that expects the audience to know history and come to the concordant conclusion as the protagonist is too young and innocent to do so.

2. From Caging Skies to Jojo Rabbit

Caging Skies by Christine Leunens offers a strange angle to the horrors of Nazism. Johannes Betzler wrecks his life to savour the presence of Elsa, a Jewish girl stashed in their attic and bask in her love, as the war swells, while he loses his family members, funds, work and finally his home. They finally separate seeing themselves for what they truly are, albeit late by a decade.

The tone of the book is dark and gloomy, and its genre, a tragedy. The take of the movie retelling *Jojo Rabbit*, on the other hand is fresh, creative, humorous, unusually bright, vivid and memorable. “The comedic approach of the film draws comparisons to other WW II films like *The Producers* (1967) or *Life is Beautiful* (1997)” (Lippert, 2021). Taika Waititi is the director and the brain behind and before the lens of the 2020 Academy Award-winning movie *Jojo Rabbit*. The amazing actors’ efficiency brings the characters to life with a striking vitality. *Jojo Rabbit*’s lighter tone, reliance on humour and focus on an absent father-figure reflect on “the personality of the person doing the adapting. What makes *Jojo Rabbit* unique is that the writer took something he probably objected to and transformed it into something he loved” (Morrison, 2019).

The film is set in a vibrant Berlin, Germany, in the last years of World War II, where the ten-year-old Jojo, the endearing Roman Griffin Davis, resides with his sweet but gritty mother Rosie, played by Scarlett Johansson, who claims that Jojo's missing father is at war, though suspected of being a deserter by the locals. Jojo conjures a ‘father figure’ and icon in the form of his very own Adolf Hitler, who appears in moments of the boy's phrenic need, bolstering his confidence or assuaging his humiliations. Taika Waititi, the writer-director, is a Polynesian Jew and dons the role of Adolf Hitler or the imaginary friend of Johannes, who is Jojo in the movie. This very representation makes this movie-adaptation unusual and remarkable for its ironic enabling of the victimised to satirise the oppressor.

When being taught to kill for the Führer at the Hitler Youth Brigade, he can't bear killing a rabbit, and flees after hearing the taunts of “Jojo Rabbit,” from which the film's title is derived. Soon, Jojo, spurred on by ‘Hitler’ is wounded in a grenade mishap and he is relegated to non-combat tasks when he chances on a Jewish girl Elsa played by Thomasin McKenzie, hidden at home by his mother. Despite Jojo’s endorsed hatred for Jews and his being much younger to Elsa, he develops a fancy for her and impersonates her former boyfriend Nathan’s letters and compiles a manual on Jewish traits by conversing with her (Brody, 2019).

2.1 The Dimensions of the Movie Retelling

Notwithstanding the film's stereotypical and exaggerated anti-Semitic antics, it also explores the horror of a Gestapo visit, Jojo’s heart wrenching discovery of his mother hanging dead in the town square for her treasonous activities and the Russian annihilation of the Nazi Hitler Youth. Elsa becomes the only ‘family member’ Jojo is left with and so he tells her that the Germans won, to prevent her leaving; but Elsa steps out, discovers the truth, slaps and forgives Jojo for his fib and then they dance together in hopeful joy.

The honest and endearing nature of Jojo and the fact that the audience become all too familiar with the moniker ‘Jojo’ instead of his full name, makes us enjoy the simple joys, and empathise with him. After being caught by surprise by Jojo’s ‘Hitler’ and being appalled by the propaganda and Nazi ideologies of the Hitler Youth, the audience feel

themselves slipping into Jojo's little shoes and his thoughts and eyes. Despite all his innocence, Jojo still has to endure painful and nerve-wracking moments, constantly challenging his personal thoughts, the ideology he wants to inculcate, his tender conscience and above all, comprehending selfless love.

Despite the fact that Jojo Rabbit is positioned in times past, it presents a rather political concept in the present tense. The fact remains that *Jojo Rabbit* "was marketed as anti-hate satire" rather than "an anti-Nazi satire" (Yamato, 2019). The film is not just about Nazi Germany, instead, it is a metaphor for contemporary asseverations and divisive politics of hatred. The goal of the film's mockery is self-evident: "It goes beyond the specifics of its drama to ridicule people who hate on the grounds of race, to reveal the influence of misinformation and adult manipulators in instilling such hatred in youngsters, and to propose an ultimate antidote for such hatred, namely, intimate relationships that show the oppressed minority's humanity" (Brody, 2019).

3. The Tragedy of the Boys in the Striped Pyjamas

Talking about the novel, Susan Scheps opines it to be a "sort of historical allegory because of the juxtaposition of the tale, which makes it allegorical rather than realistic. Many incidents in the story, although fictional, exhibit historical accuracy...the book, read as historical allegory or fable, clearly presents the atmosphere in Nazi Germany, hinting at violence, blind hatred, deplorable conditions, bullying, and fearfulness" (Scheps, 2007). The purpose of *TBISP* subtitled '*A Fable*', is to teach the lesson that "What goes around comes around" or in alluding to the biblical concept "The sins of the fathers fall on the son" and "the measure you give shall be the measure you receive." This, of course, is for the reader to identify and interpret. "In the book we see two layers of meaning in the narration, the first being Bruno, and what we see through his eyes; the second, being the reader's actual perception of what really happens" (Tysnes, 2020).

John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* centres on the nine-year-old Bruno who with his ostentatious parents and preteen sister Gretel, live in Berlin, in the course of World War II. Bruno's father is promoted as Commandant after a visit by Hitler himself, signifying that Bruno is a sheltered child of a top brass Nazi official. The family therefore relocates owing to the orders of "The Fury" which is Bruno's puerile interpretation of the 'Führer' whom he discerns "a horrible man" (Boyne, 2006). Bruno is not keen to leave "his friends Daniel, Karl, and Martin" and move to Out-With: his comprehension of the word Auschwitz. Almost all events in *TBISP*, except for the last chapter, are presented from the perspective of a child who tries to interpret everything that happens.

Living next to the concentration camp, Bruno believes it is a farm where they wear comfortable stripped pyjamas unlike his restrictive clothing. Unable to receive an explanation or clarification from the elders around him, he sets out unsupervised to explore the fence and the denizens within. He encounters and befriends Shmuel, a boy with the same birthday, despite the fact of his not understanding certain aspects of Shmuel and his fenced farm, including his Jewish identity. Bruno's naïveté serves to show that his innocence has been preserved despite being near a death camp due to his cloistered upbringing and the euphemistic parlance of the adults. All these ultimately lead Bruno to change into the stripped pyjamas, entering the camp whose actual conditions repulse him and being taunted by soldiers into a group of camp inmates on a parade to their end in the gas chamber. Bruno's innocence fuelled by his ignorance leads to his death stripped of his identity as a Nazi German but as a human like all those with him.

3.1 *The Zestful but Haunting Movie Retelling: The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (TBISP)*

Mackay in his 1985 study had affirmed the stories of most adaptations and retellings on screen would undergo changes "and its subsequent adjustments in the post-production script and edited film primarily illustrates the practical exigencies of film making and the inevitable imbalance a partial cutting can create". This is evident in *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. The movie retelling can be deemed a faithful onscreen retelling of the novel's plot even with scant digressions to accommodate the changes necessary due to the time constraint and the medium employed. However, certain changes in retelling demand our critical attention. Boyne and Herman portray the narrative via Bruno's eyes and perception, whose infantile innocence is unscathed by the concentration camp, Nazi officers for adult company, and above all coming in contact with Adolf Hitler. By writing and depicting from the conviction of an unsuspecting little boy, the story makes a visceral, uncomplicated and unpretentious impression. Herman in his screenplay fills in the gaps relying on historical detail, such as giving Bruno's Father and Mother the names of the last commandant of Auschwitz and his wife. Herman also gives a little back story to Kotler's behaviour and shows that his violence and bravado stems from his insecurity and fear, thereby showcasing that the Nazis persecuted their victims mainly in adherence to the Reich's ideals. Thus, the historical contextualization is a significant aspect that makes the movie retelling poignant and enriches it.

The story presented through the book and the movie would severely lack in appeal and profoundness, had it not been for Bruno's own perception of his reality. In showing how words like "Auschwitz" and "Führer," are too complicated for Bruno even to pronounce, Boyne and Herman bring to light how challenging, contorted and debauched the horrors of the time were. Bruno's naïve eyes become the lens for seeing the truth that Shmuel is a boy like him and a friend at that.

His sister being indoctrinated, his father, Lt. Kotler and other Nazi collaborators appear as visibly being in the wrong. In Bruno's world, the world of the unsullied child, the distinctions are simple. Nonetheless, Boyne's straightforward approach and uncomplicated wording may be a declaration that despite times of violence challenging our views and our stance, it is the voice of the innocent child that leads us to the truth. While adults may justify things with rationalisation, a child's perspective is straightforward and uncomplicated. Through the movie Herman implies that a child's perspective is of great significance.

4. Discussion and Findings

The 21st Century dynamics of the relationship between movie adaptations and its literary sources in attempting an onscreen retelling have to do more in terms of ideologies, themes and representations as the movies under study amply indicate. The fact that “movies naturally stimulate creation of beliefs, impact views of life and correct attitudes in multiple spheres” (M, Senguttuvan, Tomy, P., Baisel, A. et al, 2022) has been attested through numerous recent interdisciplinary studies. Therefore, the retellings take on a greater function and value than just an aesthetic one. These functions are explored under the areas of historical contextualization pertaining to the historical enriching lessons, the issues of Gender inequality and hegemony pertaining to the lessons that gender inequality can lower the quality of human life and of the areas of how indoctrination and problematic belief systems can sound the death knell for a peaceful and egalitarian society. There are similarities in the portrayals from the book *Caging Skies* and the film retelling *Jojo Rabbit*, but the theme and the storyline vastly differ from each other in terms of the type of presentation, the manner of giving information and the manner of description. The movie retelling therefore bends the cloying tragic genre of the novel to one of a humorous satire not bereft of moments of tragedy. Ina Samson and Junina Arcenal's observation through their *Study of Books and Their Movie Adaptations* that there is a certain difference in the interpretation of the reader and of the director who interprets for the film is proven a fact in the case of both movies (Samson, 2014). There will always be a fresh perspective and interpretation of a book with each new reader. Through his interpretation, Taika Waititi reimagined the narrative of *Caging Skies* in *Jojo Rabbit*, focusing on the themes of boyhood and growing up, and lacing them with comedy and satire. In positing the events of the book during Jojo's boyhood allows the viewers not only to empathise but also to come to the startling realization that adults and children alike can be tricked by charismatic indoctrination.

It is interesting to note that the premise of both the movie retellings is the innocence and the tender age of the protagonists. Waititi sustains Jojo as a young ten-year-old for the entirety of the film. Herman has Bruno and Shmuel be a year younger than they are in the books: they are just eight-year-olds in the movie. Their innocence can also be considered a metaphor for their ignorance, and the same ignorance most Germans gave as the reason for their inaction.

4.1 Historical Contextualization

The historical backdrop of *TBISP* is essential for grasping the layers of abstraction in the tale. The initial layer of the narrative provides a juvenile perspective on a significant piece of global history. The historical backdrop is additionally critical in the plot of the novel's film adaptation, and the quantity of factual historical information offered is certainly far more in the movie, than in the book. The adaptation also provides additional insight on elements of the novel seen through an innocent (Bruno)'s perspective such as the episodes of Grandmother's Funeral and the one involving Pavel being prime examples. The movie adaptation not only visualises the whole novel, but it augments details while removing significant sections of the novel, to make room for fresh and fascinating perspectives (Tysnes, 2020).

Usually, the film retelling delivers far more historical context than that which is present in the novel it is adapted from. The feature that initially appears at the commencement of the movie is the Nazi-flag with the insignia, a visual that most viewers associate with Nazism. In the incident where Lieutenant Kotler explodes at Pavel during dinner, the movie does not display precisely what happened, but it does include the audible impression of the attack, which guides the audience's imagination and improves their comprehension of what transpires. We never find out what happens as a result of this, but that is the last occasion we see Pavel. In the film adaptation, we get an example of two tiers in the narration. The first tier displays what the family is hearing. The second tier exhibits their facial expressions, which indicate that what is happening is unpleasant. When various tiers are incorporated, one can comprehend what is going on, especially by considering how the Nazis regarded the Jews. This event is also a fantastic illustration of how converting a text to the screen may cause an entirely different interpretation of a certain piece of the narrative.

When smoke is seen in the skyline over the residence, Lieutenant Kotler remarks to Mother that “they smell even worse when they burn” (Heyman, 2008). In this instance, 'they' alludes to the Jews in the concentration camp and the audience must be familiar with the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis by gassing and burning them.

Another example of historical contextualization is seen when word comes of the bombing of Berlin, and grandmother's death (Heyman, 2008). Also, in the father's conversation with the children about leaving their new home, he tells them that they “cannot return to Berlin until it is safe” (Heyman, 2008). In the book it is narrated as, "And with that, the

choice was decided. (...) Father stated that Mother, Gretel, and Bruno will be returning to Berlin within the next week." (Boyne, 2014). As for Grandmother's death, the book just says that "Grandmother had died and the family had to go home for the funeral" (Boyne, 2014). The reason for her death is not addressed clearly, hinting that the Berlin blitz might have been the cause, although Boyne does not declare this explicitly in the book. Heyman's choice to include this even though it does not appear in the novel may be ascribed to the film's older and more knowledgeable audience.

The dinner with Hitler is omitted from the movie. In fact, Hitler is not featured at all in the movie, save for the 'Nazi Salutes' and a flower with Hitler's name on it on grandmother's casket. It is peculiar that Hitler, the most recognisable icon of World War II and that of Nazism is not a greater part of the plot. This is consistent with facts that Auschwitz wasn't often visited by the Fuhrer and the commandant would not communicate with him directly or it could be due to the fact that his appearance in the movie retelling could be alarming and could steal the essence of the narrative.

The shocking facet of Hitler's presence on the other hand is the approach that Waititi has chosen for *Jojo Rabbit*. The screen presence of Hitler in itself shows how he and his ideology were a crutch that the Germans wore in defeat. Waititi's Hitler reminds us of the charm, comfort and motivation a charismatic leader can bring about, but it also shows the problems and incredulous situations that can arise due to it. "Waititi very wisely did a deep study of Berlin during the war years. He has clearly examined the Nazi structures, and how the Third Reich functioned. In this way, he is able to extract the most ridiculous, surreal behaviours of the Nazis and create a farcical absurdity to the otherwise deadly serious setting" (Franz, 2019). A prime example of how the historical context points to the layers of meanings is how Johannes is the typical German blonde with piercing blue eyes. Jojo, a genetic confirmation of German Aryan dominance propounded by Hitler, immediately shatters that notion by revealing to be the runt and misfit. While he possesses the characteristics that the Fuhrer admired, he disappoints anybody as a robust Aryan champion. An instance worth observation towards the conclusion of the movie, is the advent of the Russian troops who are revealed to be another self-righteous group carrying out the execution of the Nazis, perpetuating the cycle of discriminatory violence and hate.

4.2 Hegemonic Masculinities and Issues of Gender

The movies under study, *Jojo Rabbit* and *TBISP* are powerful indictments of hegemonic masculinity that resonates with contemporary issues. One of the major concerns of movies, literary works and discussions of our contemporary times are the issues related to gender. Both movies in their own way, highlight the imbalance and dire circumstances caused due to unequal treatment of the genders due to the hegemony of the masculine or adult male characters with power. "Because *Jojo Rabbit* is a controversial, complex, and commercially successful communicative phenomenon, it is ideally positioned to depict and critique hegemonic masculinity persuasively" (Lippert, 2021). Hegemonic masculinity according to Messerschmidt (2019) implies "any manifestation of masculinity or configuration of gender relations that encourages or legitimises an unequal hierarchical gender order". The onscreen interpretation of the movie retellings decries hegemonic masculinity by revealing how it mandates toxic and constricted masculine performances, highlighting how children and men endure massive pressure to express their masculinity, and exposing masculinity policing as destructive and dysfunctional (Christian L & Christian W, 2021). The film's positioning expands on *Jojo Rabbit*'s social critique while strengthening its condemnation of contemporary neo-Nazi, white supremacist movements along with criticizing Hegemonic masculinities.

The retellings more than the original novels allow the audience to observe how male superiority attitudes impact individuals, including boys and men. Be it Jojo's infantile but caustic attempts to be a "man" by taking on situations he isn't ready for, such as his threatening Elsa, or even the individuals who instruct the young Hitler Youth indoctrinating hegemonic gender norms, ring the death knell for evolution and advancement towards truth and equality. In *TBISP* Bruno's major conflict with conscience and the events that surround him stems from emotions of inadequacy generated by his father - the harsh commandant. Maguire (2012) observes, Bruno's "grandmother's drunkenness linked with her criticisms of her son and husband, and Bruno's mother's 'medicinal sherries', implicates an affair of Kotler and indicate her increased unhappiness in her role as the Commandant's wife". The female figures' intoxication and dependence on drinks reflect their dissatisfaction and want of autonomy in a situation orchestrated, once again, by figures of male dominance. Jojo's mother who has to assume both the roles of mother and father, paints the father as a rougher, tougher, uncompromising albeit a caring person. Jojo is treated with contempt by his comrades in the Hitler Youth as he doesn't have a father or any male family member present. Fraulein Rahm's ironic contributions to the movement and self-introduction in the Hitler youth camp present a stark contrast to that of the male members whose emotional, intellectual and physical contributions are lauded.

4.3 Indoctrination and Belief Systems

The recurrent trend of literary works and movies on Holocaust or World War II give a conclusive picture of the contemporary times where the threat of discrimination and divisive politics loom large. "The allure of WW II can

extend beyond historical education, entertainment, or even the nostalgic romanticizing of a heroic (and simplified) national past. The time period provides troubling inspiration for those who adopt the symbols and ideologies of Hitler and the Nazi Party". The alarming growth of neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements has been labelled a transnational threat by United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (Reuters Staff, 2021). "In the United States, groups including the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have documented increasing numbers of hate crimes, racist demonstrations, and hate group growth in recent years" (Lippert, 2021). These observations contribute to the apprehension of the general public over the belief systems and the ideologies taught to children and adolescents. These apprehensions cast their cloud over the reception of the movie retellings as they confirm the worst fears of a new generation indoctrinated with divisive and discriminatory attitudes and the permanent damage that could ensue.

Just as dismally as Johannes is in *Caging Skies*, and little Jojo with eye opening irony in *Jojo Rabbit*, Gretel too is obviously influenced by The Hitler Youth. The film depicts her transformation from a nice girl who plays with dolls and costumes to having a Swastika and Hitler posters in her room and sporting the Hitler Youth outfit. The novel, on the other hand, does not go that far with her fascination with Nazism and its ideologies, instead demonstrating to readers her newfound enthusiasm in political geography. Boyne says, "Gretel had decided that she didn't like dolls any more (...). In their place she had hung up maps of Europe that Father had given her, and every day she put little pins around constantly after consulting the daily newspaper" (Boyne, 2008). Given the fact that it is not expressly explained that she is not entering the Hitler Youth, the retelling perceives Gretel's transition in the book to be consistent with the transformations youths underwent under Hitler's dictatorship.

"According to Freud's psychoanalysis, at the developing stage of childhood, a child's psyche is dominated by the id, which is why they often act based on what they hear from others rather than by rational thought. In the light of this statement, the actions of young Jojo" are a reflection of "what he has been indoctrinated at the Hitler Youth camp. At the same time, he finds it difficult to believe everything they teach, such as violence. Here, the still developing superego tries to intervene, as observed when Jojo feels reluctant to kill a rabbit just to prove he can kill" (Pillai, Kurup & Chellarian, 2021). Similarly, Bruno when caught for sharing food with Shmuel by Kotler, lies that he did not share the food though he loves Shmuel, his best friend. His indoctrination is what stops him from telling the truth, as he has been taught that 'Jews are Vermin' and 'the enemy', and he doesn't want to be seen as a traitor. So, Bruno naturally respects and admires his father, and obeys the dictates of Herr Liszt in his sessions, but deep down he encounters an inner resistance and is haunted by their ideologies, violence, apathy and pungent behaviour. This inner resistance depicted by the innocent protagonists poignantly through the movie retellings exhorts the audience to be wary and critical of doctrines of discrimination, division and hate. Therefore eyes, voice and actions of the innocents become a powerful galvanising device of activism.

5. Conclusion

The novels and their movie retellings deal with lessons in history, humanity and psycho-sociology which can equip the present generation with an open eye and mind, capable of seeing through propaganda, sophism and indoctrination or blind adherence to inhuman causes. They also raise the ideology that fear or choosing to remain ignorant does not excuse inaction. There are no 'innocent bystanders' and inaction by choice is neglect if not a callousness of humanness. 'Following orders' does not excuse evil. "The films implant you into the situation by providing a visual depiction of the setting of the story, showing the emotions of the characters and they give you the image of those "plastic" figures that are to be created in your mind throughout the reading of a novel" (Shakib, 2012). As Giannetti observed, "it is easier to identify with the story of a film, because it takes less effort to see than to imagine (2005)". *TBISP* and *Jojo Rabbit* adopt a childlike if not childish approach to the Holocaust and Nazi indoctrination to help the audience comprehend the political and moral convolutedness of the atrocities around easily.

According to Vincent Mars, "Films can enrich the novels they are based on. Not all films, but those who adapt the soul" (Mars, 2013) of the literary work they retell. Adapting a book for screenplay and media presentation such as full-length movies, series on OTT platforms, short films, documentaries, stage enactment, etc, has become prevalent today as content that caters to the maximum stimulus of the audience. Most people anticipate their beloved books coming to life as a movie and the fact that seven out of ten movies nominated to the Academy awards of 2022 being onscreen retellings of literary works or biopics are a testament in itself. In the case of certain recent movie adaptations, it has also been the other way around.

Between the public and the Hollywood Oscars, films based on literary works have always been very well received. The economic interest of the film industry also welcomes with particular appreciation the films adapted from novels. The Pulitzer Prizes also have been awarded to many films with Literary inspiration, which proves the union between

commercial and artistic success. On the other hand, the success of the film often resulted in a commercial appreciation of the novel (Cardoso, 2019).

Movie retellings like *Jojo Rabbit* and *TBISP* are critically acclaimed and conferred with numerous awards not only because of their striking storyline. The actors and their apt presentations, especially that of the child protagonists, the directing and the entire ambience created by the movie retelling make a concrete experience that envelop the audience despite the facets of historical inaccuracy, misplaced humour, simplified takes on serious issues being prevalent. The movie shows the errors and consequences of an age bygone and brings the audience into the awareness of history repeating itself.

The novels and their movie retellings studied set out to tell tales of the genocide of the 20th century from a novel perspective but become much more, as a commentary on the 21st Century. Such retellings continue to reflect the reality of the gruesome violence still prevalent in the world and are lauded for their worthy representation which galvanise an active response from the audience.

References

- Boyne, J. (2008). *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. David Fickling Books.
- Brody, R. (2019, October 22). *Springtime for Nazis: How the Satire of "Jojo Rabbit" Backfires* | *The New Yorker*. The New Yorker; The New Yorker. Retrieved on July 20, 2020
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/springtime-for-nazis-how-the-satire-of-jojo-rabbit-backfires>.
- Cardoso, L. C. (2019). Comparative Literature and Film Studies: The Paradox of Adaptations. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 8(10), 1348-1352.
<http://www.ijstr.org/final-print/oct2019/Comparative-Literature-and-Film-Studies-the-Paradox-of-Adaptations.pdf>
- Chowdhury, N. (2018). Chapter Twenty-One The Unobstructed Obstruction: Borders And Identity In John Boyne's *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas* Namrata Chowdhury. *Border, Globalization and Identity*, 203.
- Christian, W. L., & Christian, W. (2021). *Snake Mind, Wolf Body, Panther Courage: Jojo Rabbit as a Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity* (pp. iii-4). Utah State University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Forceville, C. (1999). Review of Brian McFarlane's Novel to film: an introduction to the theory of adaptation. (Clarendon 1997). In: Sara Martín (ed.) *Links and Letters 6* ("Word and Screen"), 145-48. Retrieved 10 July 2020.
- Franz, B. (2019). *Jojo Rabbit*. *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 49(2), 34-36.
- Fuzellier, É. (1953). «De l'emploi du cinéma dans l'enseignement littéraire», *Image et son*, n.º 66.
- Giannetti, L. D., & Leach, J. (2005). *Understanding Movies* (10th ed.). Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Herman, M. (Director). (2008). *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* [Motion Picture] [Motion Picture]. Great Britain: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures (UK); Miramax Films (USA).
- Hutcheon, L. (2013). with Siobhan O'Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2, 171. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203095010>
- Kyle, D., Price, M. P., Jobin, C. J., Cleypool, K. C., & Soter, M. S. (2014). *Boekverslag Engels The boy in the striped pyjamas door John Boyne (6e klas vwo)* | *Scholieren.com*. <http://www.scholieren.com/boekverslag/81320>
- Le Juez, B. (2021, January). Modern Film Adaptations of Fairy Tales: An Examination of Four 2012 Versions of Snow White. In *Collected Papers of the 21st Congress of the ICLA* (p. 373). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110642056-029>
- Leitch, T. (2007). *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*. JHU Press.
- Leunens, C. (2019). *Caging Skies*. Penguin Random House New Zealand Limited.
- Lippert, C. W. (2021). *Snake Mind, Wolf Body, Panther Courage: Jojo Rabbit as a Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity* (Doctoral dissertation, Utah State University).
- M, Senguttuvan, Tomy, P., Baisel, A., & M, V. (2022). Movie Reviewing - A Prospective Incidental Learning Approach in English Language Acquisition. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 2, 99.
<https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v10i2.5597>
- Maguire, N. (2012). "What Bruno Knew": Childhood Innocence and Models of Morality in John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006). What do we tell the children, 56-73.
- Mars, V. (2013, October 16). *Would You Rather Read the Book or Watch the Film? – boy with a hat*. *Boy with a Hat*; Retrieved Jan 11, 2022 from
<https://www.facebook.com/WordPresscom>.<https://vincentmars.com/2013/10/16/would-you-rather-read-the-book-or>

-watch-the-film-2/

- McFarlane, B. (1996). *Novel to Film*. Oxford University Press on Demand.
- McLaughlin, R. (2013). "A Study in Sherlock: Revisiting the Relationship between Sherlock Holm" by Rebecca McLaughlin. Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University. http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj/9
- Monson, L. (2019, October 22). *How the Jojo Rabbit Book is Different From the Movie*. SlashFilm.Com; SlashFilm. Retrieved Jan 11, 2022 from <https://www.slashfilm.com/jojo-rabbit-book/>
- Perdikaki, K. (2016). *Adaptation as translation: Examining film adaptation as a recontextualised Act of Communication*. University of Surrey (United Kingdom).
- Pillai, S. S., Kurup, P. M., & Chellarian, B. S. (2021). War And Psyche: An Examination Of Psychoanalytic Theory In The Movies "Jojo Rabbit" And "Dunkirk". *Annals of the Romanian Society for Cell Biology*, 17692-17697.
- Rao, G. K., & Lakshmi, P. V. (2016). Literature, Media And Society [PDF|TXT]. *International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanity (IRJMSH)*. <https://pdfcookie.com/documents/literature-media-and-society-9mlxy96n73v7>
- Samson, I. (2014). (DOC) COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE BOOK AND ITS FILM ADAPTATION | Ina Samson - Academia.edu. Academia.Edu - Share Research. Retrieved March 16, 2022, from https://www.academia.edu/27742272/COMPARATIVE_STUDY_BETWEEN_THE_BOOK_AND_ITS_FILM_ADAPTATION. 26 March 2014
- Scheps, S. (2007). Beyond Tired of "Pajamas." *School Library Journal*, Vol 7 Issue 6, 14.
- Shakib, M. K. (2011). Comparative Analysis Amid Film and Literature. *International Journal of Arts*, 1(1), 23-25. <https://doi.org/10.5923/j.arts.20110101.02>
- Tysnes, I. D. T. (2020). *Historical Context for Young Adult Readers: Exploring the Hidden Meaning of the Novel and Film Adaption "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas"* (Bachelor Thesis, ENG2502, pp. 2-10). NTNU.
- Waititi, T. (2019). *Jojo Rabbit*. Fox Searchlight Pictures.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution license](#) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.